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ON THE

Mechanic of Oil Colours.

Price ONE GUINEA.



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Mechanics of Oil Columns

Price One Guinea

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Mechanic of Oil Colours,

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POINTING OUT

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Recommendation of such as are known by long Experience to
stand well.

By an A R T I S T,

Who has been Thirty Years in incessant Observation and Practice.

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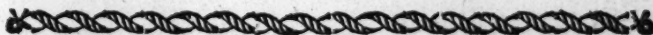
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To the R E A D E R.

LET it be observed, that in a work of
of this kind, there must be tautology,
and deficiency of stile, the author aims at
being merely intelligible—no more—this
considered, it is hoped will be a sufficient
apology.



Entered at Stationer's Hall.

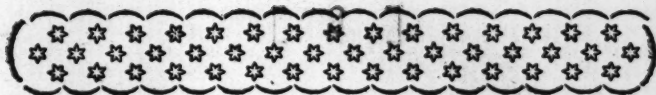


THE
MECHANIC.
OF
OIL COLOURS.

“ IF among the skilful painters, some
“ of the youngest plead interest a-
“ gainst communicating their lights and
“ secrets, and it be thought a sufficient
“ reason, yet we cannot excuse the more
“ advanced in age, their good intentions
“ will be a satisfaction to themselves, and
“ procure them the praise of others, for
B “ what

" what do such masters? they only find
 " methods for removing difficulties,
 " shortening time, and putting their
 " disciples in the way to perfect their
 " taste and genius.

Du PILES' Principles of Painting.



INTRODUCTION.

TO gentlemen students in the art, this essay is more particularly addressed, as the knowledge of colours cannot be attained but through time and experience, which time they cannot, or will not bestow, being often unavoidably employed in other avocations.

I hold with the generous sentiments of M. Du Piles, as above, that there is no excuse for those advanced in life withholding their knowledge, though but little, if that little may be useful to those of

greener years, 'tis this confideration then that stimulates the author to throw in his mite, as willing to contribute something to the perfecting an art, which is the noblest, and most extensive employment of the human faculties.

This essay may be found of use, even to experienced artists, though perhaps the making it public may not meet their approbation, but they want not to be informed, that no knowledge however extensive in the mechanic of colours can make the artist, without the scientific and sublime enthusiasm of genius; but it is certainly narrow to hold back assistance so far as it can be communicated, or to throw impediments in the way of an art,
which

which hath met with and merited the protection of the best and wisest men in all ages. And though the present race of artists in Britain labour under many disadvantages from the general coolness and disregard of them, it must give every lover of the polite arts great pleasure to find an endeavour to remove them is likely to take place.

For what avails it that the ingenious youth finds no difficulty, but rather an easy access to initiation in the advantage of a Royal Academy, that he labours there, that he attains—if at last he finds but a cold countenance his reward, the royal and gracious founder has done his part, he cannot do all, and the art must
have

have the patronage of the many, to protect and support the plentiful crop of real genius that Britain abounds with, and the academy matures.

But it is something remarkable, that no sooner the generous and patriotic society for the encouragement of arts, manufactures, and commerce was established, and premiums given to artists, which encouragement brought forward many ingenious painters, then strange to tell! an order went forth for the abolition of signs to counteract them, signs were at that time the nursery and reward of painters, for great sums were expended on those ornaments, and the best artists of the age employed in executing them, 'twas necessary
to

to be sure to alter their situations (which were become a nuisance) but not to abolish them entirely, and now the bull, the lion, &c. are fled, and left only their names behind; formerly too, coaches were embellished with historic or fancy compositions, &c. which gave much employment to genius, now those beautiful ornaments are disused, are removed to make room for the unmeaning stuff of purchased heraldry, vain ostentation of upstart pride! another, and 'tis almost a shame to mention so depraved a taste, but that many an artist has been hurt by it, I mean that ridiculous and disgusting fashion of introducing shades, that A B C of the art, with which the genteelst apartments are

dis-

disgraced and blackened by a groupe of
caffries.

These were no little blows given to the
arts, and as impolitic and injudicious, as
the adoption of the fashion of little hats,
which we borrowed from the French some
years ago, after we had beaten them out
of the fur trade—O inconsistency!—

These were shameful desertations of the
Art of Painting, to say nothing of the re-
fusal of their admittance to our churches.

However the spirit of encouragement
we hope, and find is not dead, has only
slept, a warm friend has come forward in
the worthy alderman Boydel, whose ge-
nerous

nerous spirit has long befriended them, and may be truly said to be the father of the arts in Britain, if fostering and rewarding liberally, and with affection be a fathers part, he very wisely and humanely considers, it matters not to multiply and raise up a number of ingenious artists by the decoy of an academy, without contriving to find employment for them. Generous man ! the arts look up to you ! your noble and spirited example, 'tis wished and believed will have its imitators, and alderman Boydel's generous interference will be held ever in grateful remembrance and esteem, and the artist have the chance to preserve his golden medal which genius and industry has procured

cured him, and leave it to his posterity as
a record of the honour received, without
the danger of the melting pot.*

* Many of them have been parted with through
necessity.



C H A P. I.

VERY much has been said, and an evil report is gone abroad and propagated by the dealers in old paintings, I believe more through envy or interest than truth, that the modern pictures will not stand—have not stood—but departed before their models: that there is some foundation for this assertion I am well aware of, having more than once lamented over designs that would have honoured the age of Leo, which will not

handed down to the next generation ; but these negligencies are not common, nor always found with the same master.

To make the art of managing the colours more certain, and not liable to those perishable effects, the author, whose life has been spent in expensive experiments, and laborious search after the proper oils and varnishes, has discovered a method which he doubts not will be acknowledged an improvement, and which shall enable the artist to give tenacity to his colours, by which they will retain their force and freshness we so much admire in the old masters, and willing to impart, he throws open the door of his study and invites the ingenious in, promising faithfully to communicate

municate his experience, and hold up his lights for their observance.

He does not in this little tract pretend to dictate to the artist how he shall proceed in the practice of painting, that being the part of science, and every artist, supposing him a genius, will have a method of his own adoption as best suits his ideas and stile of working, only, after he has studied to make his pictures worth preserving, to furnish him with the materials to give a duration to his works and his fame. Being convinced from long experience and practice, the method here recommended will enable them to stand the test of time, and put the moderns in this respect, upon a par with the masters of former ages.

The

The great love the author bears the sublime and liberal, though much neglected Art of Painting, and the pleasure he takes in communicating, is the strong reason that induces him to give up the result of many years study to the inexperienced student to shorten the long, and tedious, it may be said intricate road that leads to perfection.

How many with great abilities, and fine genius in design, have sought for the attainment of knowing the Mechanic of Colours, yet have ever been in the dark, 'tis much to be regretted that an early help has not been at hand, that the utmost time might be given to the more material and scientific studies, as the longest life is

too short for the acquisition of perfection
in all.

Every artist has his peculiar secrets,
which he holds dear, as purchased by
length of time and application, and he
values them accordingly, and rarely im-
parts them.

As yet there has appeared no work that
gives sufficient light, indeed scarce any to
this part of the art, what has been given
to the public was by those little skilled as
artists, and less in the Mechanic of Co-
lours, 'tis hoped this will remove every
impediment, that mode of proceeding here
laid down will be clear and easily under-
stood,

stood, and however trifling some may think it, is of the last consequence to the great artist whose works are to honour the age he lives in.

C H A P.



C H A P. II.

Oil as a Vehicle for Painting.

IT is generally supposed that the modern painters works are inferior to the old masters for permanancy, and retaining their freshness, and that this is occasioned by their being in possession of better colours, as white, &c. but this is certainly a mistaken supposition, in some respects it may be so, but 'tis not owing to the pigments which were no better than we use, many

D

not

not so good, no! the evil lays in the oils, which are not so pure from a neglect in their preparations, how many of the ancient artists were chymists? were particularly curious in examining, and purifying their oils and their varnishes, all were prepared by themselves, they trusted not to colourmen, a trade to them unknown, who, 'tis feared, too frequently substituted one substance for another, and at best cannot know what will answer the artist's particular purpose; however as it is in vain in these days to advise the artist to take the trouble of the preparations on himself, 'tis adviseable to examine by every proof in his power the materials he uses.

That

That formerly much labour and time were bestowed this way, may be gathered from the well-known story of Leonardo de Vinci.

“ Pope Leo the tenth, designing to
 “ employ Leonardo, he set himself to
 “ the expressing his oils, and preparing of
 “ varnish to cover his paintings withal, of
 “ which the pope being informed, said
 “ peevishly enough, that he could expect
 “ nothing from a man who thought of
 “ finishing his works before he had begun
 “ them.”

The painter however was right, and that great patron of the arts not justifiable in this; 'twas to such judicious labour we

are indebted for those master pieces of art delivered down to us in such perfection and preservation.

But as from custom and use, a colour-man must be the agent for such things as the artist stands in need of, and as many of them no doubt are men of integrity and character, with knowledge in the trade, and open to improvement, this may be found useful to them, and profitable, if due attention is paid to these directions, may prevent the painters disappointment and disgrace attending the supplying him with bad materials, as once, (I remember) some years ago happened to several eminent painters now living; 'twas in the infancy of the exhibition of the
society

society of artists, when by the use of a bad oil procured from a colour shop, the pictures never dry'd during the month, but parted from their pigments and ran down in tears, whether at the folly of the artist, or the knavery of the colour-man history says nought.

However a good drying oil is not to be had of them, what they furnish us with being so high coloured as to be improper for the purposes of fine painting, and only can be admitted in the darkest shades or back grounds, therefore to make the white and other light colours dry, which will not admit of their brown oil, a small portion of sacra saturnum, or sugar of lead, is ground up with those colours in their
vicious

vicious and unprepared oil, to be sure this method answers one end purposed, that is to make them dry, but they inevitably will change yellow, from the unprepared and greasy state of the oil, therefore to rob the oil of its grease (that enemy of the colours) the occasion of its tardiness to dry, and tarnishing of the tints, to extract that grease and render the oil a pure varnish, quick in drying, is a desirable acquisition; the method of doing it is simple, and attended with little or no expence, (see the recipe No. 1.) which simple operation is there communicated, it is proved by experience, that even linseed oil thus prepared, will keep its colour better than either poppy or nut unprepared; any of those oils may by this process be made
strong

strong dryers, and not injure their colour, and either may be used as best suits the artist's purpose, but for all finer works poppy should be recommended.

With poppy oil thus prepared all the colours should be ground, even to black, and here let it be observed, that it is of as much consequence in the dark colours as the light ones, as they all in their turns contribute to form their delicate tints with white, and if they change however little, will spoil the harmony of the picture, therefore 'tis absolutely necessary that every colour should be ground with pure and colourless drying oil, the expence being no object where perfection is aimed at, the artist will have much pleasure and satisfaction

tisfaction to find his colours dry so well from his hand, bear out with such force and brilliancy, and retain their freshness, as has been proved by long experience.

A colour cannot have a worse property than that of a tardy dryer, as it holds what dust shall unavoidably fall on it, consequently sullies the beauty of the tint, some artists aware of the bad qualities of oils in use, make too free with turpentine to work thin, but this not only leaves the picture dead, but carries off part of the force in the evaporation, to remedy this they lay a varnish of the same turpentine and mastic over it, to bring out the colour again, but in vain, nor will those paintings stand any length of time, and are
subject

subject to crack, but the method proposed renders the oil so tenacious, that it will preserve the colours fresh for ages; those pigments most liable to change, or fly off, as lakes, king's-yellow, prussian blue, &c. have long been tried and found as bright as when first laid on, though hung against a south wall exposed to all weathers for four years. The picture of the adoration of the eastern magi, now the altar-piece at St. Margaret's chapel at Bath, was exposed in a garden to all weathers, night and day, for more than three months to try a new colour, and found as perfect and fresh as from the pencil, from which we may presume, scarce any time can injure them within doors.



C. H. A. P. III.

On Varnish proper for Painting:

THERE is no part of the Mechanic of Painting in which artists differ more, than in the article of varnish, some preferring one sort, some another, and many using none, vainly supposing the fresh colours need none, but the advantages of a good varnish are manifold; though it will not make a bad picture a good one, the prejudice some have against it, is the difficulty
of

of obtaining one that is proper, for indif-
 putably the old masters never thought
 their pictures finished without: some fur-
 nish themselves with the plain hungry
 mastic varnish, purchased at the shops,
 others use a sandrick in spirits of wine,
 while some content themselves with only
 the white of an egg; but let it be ob-
 served that any varnish or glazing given to
 a new painted picture, that dries quicker
 than the colours they are laid on, will un-
 doubtedly crack them, the same if the
 colours are mixt with it, much beauty to
 be sure for the present may be procured
 to pictures thus wrought, aye, even by
 common rosin, but beware the conse-
 quence! I have seen various specimens of
 the evil produced by the use of it, in fe-

veral painter's works which have deserved a better fate; it would be invidious to mention names.

From these observations it is plain, the varnish should partake of the nature of the colours they are laid on, for this purpose it should be made mostly of fine prepared oil, so proportioned to the gum, that no time will subject it to cracking, nor yet too powerful of oil, for even the clearest and most transparent oil will, in time, become opaque; if it had not that effect, oil itself prepared would be the best varnish, all gums that are easily affected by heat, even of the hand, or slightly rubbing them, are improper for

a painting, will long continue clammy, and soon lose its transparency.

The varnish proposed, (No. 3,) is found to answer all the uses of the artist, as it not only enriches the tint, but nourishes them, if I may be allowed the expression: true it is not to be taken off again, as many weak connoisseurs think all varnishes should, but it is a mistaken notion, nor is it possible to remove any varnish from a new painted picture, (unless it be some trivial water flop) without bringing off the colours with it.

But the varnish recommended here, is absolutely the finishing of the picture in the hands of a skilful artist, and to attempt to
remove

remove it, would be to finish the picture with a vengeance; probably many of the present artists are already in possession of these secrets, some I know are, as their good sense and industry would naturally in length of time, fetch them from the same source, but for those this little tract is not designed, but to enable the unexperienced student just beginning his arduous attempt, to overcome this formidable impediment to his success, to save him much time and disappointment.



C H A P. IV.

On Pigments, or dry Colours.

IT were to be wished that the artist would make himself well acquainted with the qualities and hues of the different pigments in their dry state, that he may judge of the goodness or deficiency of them when ground in oil, it is pity, but it is true, there are many, and some of much merit, that scarce know the difference

rence of umber and oaker in their crude state; feldom if ever seeing them but in bladders, consequently are easily imposed on by a fine looking substitute, and the wholesale venders have many improved tricks to deceive for their own emolument, even the oakers are adulterated, nay, strange to tell, are counterfeited,* since the scarcity of good stone oaker, it is plain there is no trusting to the eye alone, the

* Some years ago, this knavery was little practiced, but it is now become general, and an established mode of trade, the young tradesman has no idea of the injustice of the act, having learnt it of his very conscientious and religious master, for which a premium was given; and I have heard a very reputable tradesman declare, that he did not think any man fit for business, who had not ingenuity enough to sell a sheet of brown paper for a yard of broad cloth.

the fire must be the necessary prover of mineral colours.

Those proper and sufficient for every file of painting, are

1. Flake white,*
 2. Fine Nottingham lead,
 3. Burnt umber,*
 4. Yellow oaker,*
 5. Burnt ditto,
 6. Red oaker,*
 7. Brown oaker,
 8. Indian red,
 9. Antwerp brown,*
 10. Siena earth,*
 11. Ditto burnt,*
 12. Lamp black,*
- F
13. Ivory

13. Ivory black,
14. Prussian blue,*
15. Common vermilion,
16. India ditto
17. Pale or bright ditto,*
18. Yellow lake,*
19. Patent yellow,*
20. Naples yellow,
21. Fine red lead,*
22. Brown oaker,
23. Brown pink,
24. Purple brown,*
25. Fine scarlet lake,*
26. Purple or deep lake.*

N. B. The two lakes, and prussian blue,
must only be mixt when wanted, as in a
week

week they will grow (as the painters phrase it) fat; and unfit for use.

These are all and more than wanted, those marked with an asteric being sufficient.

For it is an axiom that you want no simple or primary colour which can be made out of those you are already in possession of—as the simpler the system, the less trouble in the practice.*

F 2

* I remember an old gentleman, who had for years practised the painting of butterflies from nature, and which he performed in a delicate and exquisite manner, but living in a remote country, unacquainted with artists,

or any rational system of colours, with a patience that would have surmounted any difficulties, had collected a multitude of shells of colour, of every various tint that could possibly be discerned in the wing of that beautiful insect; for he had no idea that out of two he could make a third, by this method he had accumulated two large hampers full of shells, which he placed on each side of him, and sometimes the individual tint he wanted, was half a day's labour to find out. What excellence must he have arrived at, had he known how to have mixt his tints.

The



The Properties of the Colours.

No. 1. **F**LAKE white. When pure is the best, though it has not the body of Nottingham white lead.

No. 2. Nottingham lead. There are two sorts, the best little inferior in whiteness to the best flake white, will stand well.

No. 4. Yellow oaker, The best stone very difficult to be had genuine, but the want of it may be supplied by Siena earth,
and

and Nottingham lead, which will produce the same tint or rather brighter, with this advantage, that it is much deeper in its tone, with less of the lead in it—the great body of the lead supporting the Siena earth, which alone is semi-transparent.

No. 3. Burnt umber, a very quick drier.

No. 6. Red oaker. This is a valuable colour, can it be had genuine, for though so very cheap, it is adulterated, the best is that which is very hard and stony, difficult to grind, more difficult to come at, having never seen any in the shops, but procured it from the pits; this with a little deep lake, is not inferior to the best Indian red.

No.

No. 8. Indian red. The foregoing will be a substitute for this.

No. 9. Antwerp brown. This brown, I believe is not to be had in the shops at present, but may be thus prepared, it is a valuable colour from its great depth of tone, has great body, and will undoubtedly stand well, being produced by fire; put some good asphaltum into an iron ladle, set it over a slow fire, taking care it does not boil over, keep it there till it will boil no more, and it becomes nearly a cinder, when cold put to it the proportion of half an ounce of sugar of lead, to half a pound of the calx, grind it in the strongest drying oil. It will work free and dry well.

No.

No. 10. Siena earth. This is a fine colour, but comes little into use.

No. 11. More useful, especially for landscape.

No. 12. Lamp black. Should be burnt in an iron box till red hot, being a greasy colour, and when mixt with the strongest drying oil, still requires the assistance of a little sugar of lead.

No. 13. Ivory black. The same bad principles of the former, makes not so beautiful a tint with white.

No. 14. Prussian blue.

No.

No. 15. Common vermilion.

No. 16. Indian ditto.

No. 17. Pale or bright ditto, This is by much the most useful, as the other vermilions may be made with this and good lake, but they cannot come up to the brightness of this by any mixture whatever.

No. 18. Yellow lake. Should be used sparingly, it will not shew much of its beauty a hundred years hence, unless well secured by varnish; is a bad dryer.

No. 19. Patent yellow. A new invented colour, very bright and durable; dries well.

G

No.

No. 20. Naples yellow. A dangerous colour, will not bear iron to touch it without altering its tint.

No. 21. Fine red lead. By an improved method of purifying it, is amazingly bright, and will stand well.

No. 22. Brown oaker. This may be made from yellow oaker, and others.

No. 23. Brown pink. A better colour and more certain, may be made from No. 9, and No. 18.

No. 24. Purple brown, or colcothar of vitriol, a good body and durable.

No.

No. 25. Fine scarlet lake.

No. 26. Purple or deep lake. This is the most useful of the two, and the most to be depended on, the scarlet lake is very subject to fly off, but being very beautiful is much used, however the other has greater depth of tint, and will produce an effect the scarlet lake cannot, but it is an indifferent dryer, and must be helped.

All these colours except those mentioned in strong drying oil, should be ground in the less drying and prepared oil, or in summer they would dry so soon as to be troublesome.



No. 1.

*A Recipe to make a strong and
colourless*

OF (the
preference given in the order they
stand) one quart, put it into a glass bottle,
made in the form of the small vials, put
to it one pound of the best not
powdered, but in the gross, the powdered
is

is often adulterated with red lead,* shake these well together two or three times a day for a week, then let it settle clear; and pour it off for use, taking care that none of the tallow-like grease thrown down by the comes off with it, it will be found a good strong with very little alteration in the colour, the longer it is on the the stronger it will be, the designed for grinding up the

* 'Tis much to be regretted that mankind are grown so degenerate, and that men who expect to retain a good name, should let avarice so far get the better of their honesty, as to make no scruple to substitute one article for another, and it is now so common, that scarce any thing the druggist sells but is sophisticated, and it behoves every one who trades with them to have some judgment in the commodity.

the white, &c. must have only half the quantity of and half the time upon it, with the same shaking.

N. B. The will do several times, after draining the grease from it.



No. 2.

*A used in making that very
useful or liniment-like
for glazing, &c.*

TWELVE ounces of pure
put it to one quart of spirit of
in a glazed earthen pot, for
safety

* And here again look after the druggist, or you will
have half or as it is much
cheaper than but will not dissolve in
without more heat than will bear, nor answer
the end when done.

The will be found at the bottom of the pot,
undissolved.

safety have a large iron heater made near red hot, on this set the pot in some open place, where free from danger, let it boil very gently about a minute, it is easily dissolved even without boiling, keep stirring it with a stick; when melted set it by to clear, keep it in a bottle well corked for use.

This is commonly sold in the shops, but so poor and thin, as not to be fit for the use designed here, and frequently it is made with



No. 3.

*A finishing for Paintings
in Oil.*

THE finest and clearest
made of one quart, the
(is yet better,
there being no oil in it) put it into an
earthen pipkin, set it over a very gentle
fire, it need not boil, if pretty hot it is
enough, at the same time set another pip-
kin over the same fire, containing three
half pints of and half a pint of
H strong

strong drying oil mixt together, when hot
 take both pots off, and pour the in
 very small quantities into the
 and oil, every time replacing the pots on
 the fire to preserve the heat, repeat this
 several times, a dozen at least, till the
 whole is mixt, keep it continually stirring
 to incorporate them well, take it from the
 fire as soon as possible, least it brown the
 too much.

N. B. Were they put together cold,
 too hastily, or in too large a quantity at a
 time, the would be precipitated to
 the bottom.

Let it stand to clear well stopp'd in a
 bottle for use, so much being thrown
 into

into it, prevents cracking, and makes it more proper for oil paintings; it is long drying, and must be kept free from dust, two or three days after that it sets, and retains no stickiness, as &c. always does.

N. B. Very small pictures may be neatly painted with this varnish alone.



To make the Liniment, or

THE strongest two parts,
 put it into a wide-mouthed bottle,
 and fill up the remaining part with the
 shake them quick to-
 gether, and in a few minutes you will
 find it a strong and clear jelly, which for
 some parts of painting will be found very
 useful.

For



For those that are totally unacquainted with the use of oil colours, and the method of setting a pallet, are these directions given.

PLACE the white next the thumb, or to the right end of the pallet as it is held, *patent yellow next, ranging them in the following order, next to the patent yellow, ditto oaker, *Siena earth, vermilion, red oaker, purple brown, lake, burnt umber, Antwerp brown, black, prussian blue.

Those marked with a *, are not wanted in the painting a face.

When

When the pallet is done with for the day, the colours should be taken off and placed on a glass or pot pallet, in the same order, and put into a clean pan of water, covering the pot to prevent dust getting to it, by this they will be preserved fit for use a long time.

For gentlemen practitioner's who are often obliged to break off abruptly, the pallet itself with the colours downwards may be put upon the water.

The pallet should be well seasoned with oil both upper and under part, to prevent the water having effect on the wood.

F I N I S.

